

## Preventing Dog Bites and Attacks

More than 4 million Americans are bitten by dogs every year. When a dog bites, everybody pays. Dog bite victims suffer painful and disfiguring injuries. Dog owners suffer legal and liability consequences. Insurance companies pay millions in medical costs. And the dog often loses his home, his family, and even his life.

A significant percentage of dog bite victims are young children. The elderly and home service people such as mail carriers and meter readers are also frequent victims of dog bites.

Fortunately there are steps we can take to address this problem.

What's a dog owner to do?

- Carefully consider your pet selection. Your veterinarian is a good source for information about behavior and suitability.
- Neuter your pet. It's a fact: Dogs who have been spayed or neutered are happier, healthier, and three times less likely to bite.
- If you adopt a dog, make sure that he/she is socialized properly so that he feels comfortable around other people and other animals. Ease your dog into a variety of situations a little at a time. Don't put him/her in a position where he feels threatened or teased.
- Dogs are social animals, spend time with your pet. Dogs that are left alone or tied up for long periods of time have a greater chance of developing behavior problems.
- Train your dog. The basic commands "sit", "stay", "no", and "come" can be incorporated into fun activities which build a bond of obedience and trust between pets and people.
- Don't play aggressive "attack" games like wrestling or tug of war with your dog. He won't always understand the difference between play and real-life situations.
- Keep your dog healthy. Have him vaccinated against rabies and preventable infectious diseases. Good health is important to how your dog feels and behaves.
- Obey leash laws. It's the law.
- License your dog. It's the law.

How can I avoid dog bites?

- Be cautious around strange dogs and treat your own pet with respect.
- Because children are frequently the victims of dog bites, parents and caregivers should teach children at a young age to be careful around pets.
- Never leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- Children should be taught to ask permission from the owner before petting a dog.
- Don't run past a dog that's caring for puppies, sleeping or eating.
- Be cautious around a confined or chained dog. An unneutered dog that is confined most of the time is the most likely type of dog to bite.

- If a dog approaches to sniff you—stay still.
- If you're threatened by a dog, remain calm—don't scream. Don't turn and run.
- If you fall to the ground, curl into a ball with your hands over your head and neck, protecting your face.

What should I do if my dog bites?

- Restrain the dog immediately—separate him from the scene of the attack and confine him.
- Call 911 if paramedic attention is required.
- If immediate police response is needed call 911, otherwise call your local health department to report bite occurrence.
- Wash wound with soap and water.
- Consult your veterinarian for advice about dog behavior that will help prevent similar problems from occurring.
- Animal must be seen by a veterinarian within 24 hours of attack. It's the law

Dogs are wonderful companions. By acting responsibly, owners not only reduce the number of dog bites, but also enhance the relationships they have with their dogs.